

Antibiotics Not Always The Best Medicine

DOVER – As cold and flu season begins, many people will visit their health care provider and hope to be prescribed antibiotics to ease their symptoms. However, antibiotics cure bacterial infections, not viruses like the cold and flu. In fact, up to 50 percent of all the antibiotics prescribed for people are not needed or are not optimally effective as prescribed. Misuse and overuse is the single most important factor leading to antibiotic resistance around the world.

Antibiotic resistance has been called one of the world's most pressing public health problems. That's why the Division of Public Health (DPH) is observing Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, Nov. 16 – 22, 2015. Get Smart About Antibiotics Week is an annual effort to raise awareness of antibiotic resistance and the importance of appropriate antibiotic prescribing and use.

"Antibiotics are the most important tool we have to combat life-threatening bacterial diseases, but misusing them can result in dangerous side effects," said Dr. Karyl Rattay, DPH Director. "Patients, health care providers, and hospital administrators must work together to use effective strategies for improving antibiotic use which ultimately improves medical care and saves lives." Each year more than two million people in the United States get infections that are resistant to antibiotics and at least 23,000 people die as a result, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Antibiotic overuse increases the development of drug-resistant germs. Every time a person takes antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones may be left to grow and multiply. Repeated and improper use of antibiotics

threatens the usefulness of these important drugs. When antibiotics do not work, infections often last longer, cause more severe illness, require more doctor visits or extended hospital stays, and involve more expensive and potentially toxic medications. Some resistant infections can even cause death.

Antibiotic resistance in children is of particular concern because they have the highest rates of antibiotic use and often have fewer drug choices since some antibiotics cannot be safely given to children. The CDC says antibiotics cause one out of five emergency department visits for adverse drug events (ADEs). Antibiotics are the most frequent cause of ADEs in children.

Antibiotic resistance is also of concern to residents of long-term care facilities. Overuse of antibiotics creates an unnecessary risk for adverse drug events, such as *Clostridium difficile* infection, a sometimes deadly diarrhea.

Everyone has a hand in preventing the spread of antibiotic resistance. DPH offers the following tips:

- Parents should ask their health care provider what is the best course of treatment for a child's illness. In some cases it is better to treat the symptoms than use an antibiotic.
- Parents should also consult with their child's pediatrician to ensure that any antibiotic prescribed is the best type to address the child's illness.
- Health care providers are encouraged to avoid treating viral syndromes with antibiotics, even when patients ask for them.
- Health care providers should pay attention to dose and duration: The right antibiotic needs to be prescribed at the right dose for the right duration.
- Health care providers should be aware of antibiotic-resistance patterns in your area so that you can always

choose the right antibiotic.

- Hospital and nursing home providers should reassess within 48 hours of starting antibiotics, when the patient's culture results come back and adjust the prescription if necessary. Stop the prescription, if indicated.
- Health care providers should practice good hand hygiene and other infection control measures with every patient.

For more information about Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/2014/dpk-antibiotics-week.html>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.